

THE ASYLUM

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*A good book is
the best of friends,
the same to-day
and forever.*

Martin F. Tupper
1810–1889



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The Asylum

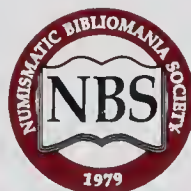
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Front cover: Gold half augustalis of Emperor Frederick II, from the Medagliere of the Vatican Library (enlarged 3×).



A Brief History of the *Medagliere* of the Vatican Library

Eleonora Giampiccolo

The Vatican *Medagliere* can be considered one of the foremost numismatic institutions in the world, and due to its history it can be compared to the mythological Arabian phoenix. Indeed, after reaching great fame thanks to its invaluable patrimony, it practically ceased to exist during the wars of the French Revolution. However, like the mythological bird, the *Medagliere* rose from its ashes with the support of its keepers and with the generosity of the pontiffs who made great efforts to rebuild it.

The origins of the *Medagliere* of the Vatican Library can perhaps be traced to the supposed numismatic collections gathered by Julius II (1503–1513) and Marcellus II (1555). However, the first certain information about a numismatic collection at the Vatican Library dates to the time of Urban VIII who, in 1628, entrusted to his nephew Francesco Barberini, who was Cardinal Librarian, more than 600 coins to be stored in a small cabinet (which still exists) bearing the papal arms. It was not until the pontificate of Clement XII Corsini (1730–1740) that we find a numismatic collection worthy of the name at the *Medagliere*. In 1738, the Pope acquired from Cardinal Alessandro Albani, nephew of Clement XI, an extraordinary collection of 328 Greek and Roman medallions, including many rare pieces. He extended to them the same restrictions that Sixtus V had established for books and manuscripts, for anyone with an inclination to purloin or damage the material of the Vatican Library.

One decade later, Benedict XIV Lambertini (1740–1758) acquired the great collection of Cardinal Gaspare Carpegna, who had been Cardinal Vicar for forty years, which was left to his heirs in 1714. His collection, including over 4,000 pieces among which there were 100 Roman aurei and over 500 papal medals, became the fundamental nucleus of the Vatican *Medagliere*, which received some years later a collection of papal lead bullae sold by the antiquarian Francesco Ficoroni and 6,666 “sulphur [casts] of ancient cameos and carvings existing in the most important



Figure 1. The main room of the Vatican *Medagliere*.

European Museums”, engraved by Pier Leone Ghezzi (1674–1755), a famous painter and one of the most prominent artists at the time. With these important acquisitions, the Vatican *Medagliere* was on its way to becoming one among the most prestigious institutions in the numismatic field at the time.

In 1746 Benedict XIV acquired the most complete collection of papal coins that had existed: the collection of Saverio Scilla, who in 1715 had published a book entitled *Breve notizia delle monete pontificie antiche e moderne sino alle ultime dell’Anno XV del regnante Pontefice Clemente XI, raccolte e poste in ordine distinto con particolari annotazioni e osservazioni*. The collection of Scilla included more than 5,000 pieces; to them over 4,100 paper impressions of papal coins were added. It was sold by Scilla’s heirs to Benedict XIV for a very reasonable sum in comparison with its historical and commercial value. A few years later, the Vatican *Medagliere* increased its collections thanks to a series of tragic and fortuitous circumstances. As a terrible famine was raging in the Papal State in 1764, Clement XIII Rezzonico (1758–1769) ordered the opening of the *Erario Sanziore*, an emergency fund which had been created in 1586 by Sixtus V to help the population in case of necessity. The *Erario Sanziore* was held in three strongboxes (now in the Castel Sant’Angelo); their

opening revealed some of very rare coins among the contents. Most of these entered the *Medagliere*.

The election of Clement XIV Ganganelli (1769–1774) marked a decisive turning point in the history of the Vatican *Medagliere*. The Pope, who was a very keen numismatist, entrusted Giovanni Elia Baldi with the task of looking after the papal coin and medal collection, appointing him Prefect of the Christian and Secular Museums, both under the patronage of the Library. Baldi worked very hard, putting in place a scheme of exchanges, purchases, and donations which nearly completed the series of all papal coins and working on the drafting of general and individual inventories. In addition, the Pope increased the collection of ancient coins by acquiring the collection of Msgr. Ballerini, who had almost 2,000 Roman coins.

Pius VI showed the same interest in coins as his predecessor: he enriched the *Medagliere* with rare pieces coming from excavations around Latium. Pius VI also acquired for the *Medagliere* the collection of Prince Livio Odescalchi, which was one among the most renowned numismatic collections existing at the time and which included many specimens that had once belonged to Queen Christina of Sweden.

In 1789 the message of the French Revolution was spreading throughout Europe and in 1796 Napoleon Bonaparte came to Italy. The misguided policy of Pius VI caused a military conflict with the French troops and General Bonaparte imposed the onerous Treaty of Tolentino on the Holy See on 19 February 1797. In order to satisfy the French demands, the Pope was forced to melt not only gold and silver religious ornaments, but also to eat into the precious numismatic patrimony of the Vatican *Medagliere*. The events followed swiftly: on 28 December 1797 General Duphot was assassinated near the French Embassy, on 11 January 1798 General Berthier received the order to march on Rome from the Directory, and on 9 February he arrived at the gates of the city, taking the small papal garrison by surprise. A few days later, the French occupied Rome and sealed the various museums, the Mint, the *Monte di Pietà*, and any other place which could represent a source of booty. On 15 February 1798, the Roman Republic was proclaimed. Pius VI was dethroned and French troops occupied the Vatican. In the meantime, groups of soldiers entered the Vatican Library and soon moved towards the rooms where the collections of the *Medagliere* were; they started to steal the gold and silver coins, the medals, and the precious cameos as well.

The numismatic collection was liberally plundered and all the numismatic material was gathered into hemp bags. Only in May, when the soldiers finished their despoliation, did the government intervene, appointing three civilian commissioners with the task of depriving the Vatican Museums of the best pieces: statues, codices, paintings, and coins, especially the Greek and Roman medallions which had belonged to the Albani and Carpegna collections.

It seemed the end for the glorious Vatican *Medagliere*, but another era was about to begin. Barnaba Chiaramonti was elected Pope on 14 March 1800 and took the name Pius VII; he reached Rome on 3 July of the same year. The situation in Rome was disastrous; the French and the Jacobins had been expelled, but the city had been almost plundered by its “liberators”: the Sanfedisti of Cardinal Ruffo, the Bourbon Neapolitan troops, and the guerillas of Fra’ Diavolo as well. The first years of his pontificate were very hard for the new Pope, who tried to clear the financial deficit thanks to the watchful policy of the Cardinal Secretary of State, Ercole Consalvi. Despite his financial difficulties, Pius VII acquired for the Library the great collection of ancient Roman and colonial coins of Pier Maria Vitali, but fearing the worst, he told nobody and entrusted them to Antonio Canova, who had been appointed Director of the Vatican Museums. It could have been the beginning of a rebirth, but during the night of 6 July 1809, General Radet, by command of Napoleon, entered the Quirinal and imprisoned the Pope, taking him into exile. Rome was annexed to the French Empire and became its second city. The new superintendent of the Library, Martiale Daru, appointed by Napoleon and obeying the order of the Emperor, transferred the Library’s most precious codices still in Rome to Paris, but at the same time he tried to reconstruct a numismatic section at the Vatican Library, availing himself of the expert advice of Filippo Aurelio Visconti and taking advantage of material coming from archaeological excavations in Rome and the surrounding areas. It was not much, but when Pius VII came back to the Papal States in May 1814, he found a nucleus of a new *Medagliere*. After the definitive defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo on 18 June 1815, Cardinal Consalvi decided to hasten the restitution of the masterpieces stolen from the Vatican by the French. As there was no complete inventory of the numismatic collections of the *Medagliere*, Canova and Msgr. Marini, who had been appointed for the mission, had to be content to receive the same number of coins, but not the exact same pieces.

The medallions of the Albani and Carpegna collections had to be exchanged for some Greek and Roman coins, because they could not be found. In practice the French did return not even half of the previous contents of the Vatican *Medagliere*. In January 1816, some of the recovered or exchanged coins arrived in Rome and very soon the Vitali collection, so carefully safeguarded by Canova, was added. In 1821 the *Medagliere* received an important donation from the Austrian Emperor Francis I: reproductions of the gems kept in Vienna created by Luigi Pichler, one of the most famous engravers at the time.

The reign of Pius VIII, who had been an expert numismatist when he was still cardinal, was too short to bring evident changes in the history of the *Medagliere*; however, under Gregory XVI Cappellari (1831–1846), the *Medagliere* was enlarged with additional very precious coins and medals, acquired or donated, and careful attention was paid towards medals, especially the papal ones and those of other states.

The first years of Pius IX Mastai Ferretti (1846–1878), elected amid the general enthusiasm of the Liberals but then forced into exile in Gaeta,



Figure 2. Reverse of medal commemorating the exile of Pius IX in Gaeta, by Nicola Cerbara, 1848. It was commissioned to thank the members of the diplomatic corps who had worked to enable the Pope to return to his See.

the proclamation of the Second Roman Republic, and the subsequent political events did not have particular importance in the history of the *Medagliere*: nevertheless, in the years 1848–1850, an unpleasant event happened. A certain Demetrio Diamilla, a young scholar in numismatics to whom the task of inventorying the material of the *Medagliere* was assigned, embezzled some very rare and precious pieces during his job. The theft was soon discovered and a judicial process followed. For this reason, Pius IX entrusted the *Medagliere* to the Reverend Fr. Tessieri, a distinguished scholar of numismatic sciences.

Since most of Scilla's great collection, pride of the *Medagliere*, had not been returned by French, Fr. Tessieri rebuilt the section of papal coins and, under the encouragement of Cardinal Secretary of State Antonelli, acquired the collection of Andrea Belli, including over 2,800 pieces, some of which were very ancient and rare.

When Fr. Tessieri became ill in 1871, the famous orientalist Ignazio Guidi was appointed as his assistant. During his time, the Vatican *Medagliere* enriched itself with very rare and unique pieces like the *tressis* of the wheel series and some Etruscan coins coming from the Vatican Etruscan Museum.

Carlo Ludovico Visconti succeeded Guidi; he was the Secretary of the Academy of Archaeology and an experienced archaeologist and numismatist. Visconti began the practice of listing the acquisitions and output material in appropriate registers. The donation of contemporary coins and medals that Pius IX left to the *Medagliere* was notable.

Visconti died in 1894 and Enrico Stevenson succeeded him. In four years he managed to move the offices of the *Medagliere* and to initiate the acquisition of the great collection of papal coins of Cardinal Lorenzo



Figure 3. Reverse of denarius struck by the Italian confederation during the Social War (90 BC), showing a bull goring the Roman she-wolf (enlarged 2 ×).



Figure 4. Gold 10 ducats struck under Sixtus IV, showing Christ and St. Peter with sheep feeding at their feet on the obverse and Christ walking on the waves and succoring St. Peter on the reverse.

Randi, over 26,000 specimens sold by the cardinal's heirs. Stevenson died in August 1898 and Camillo Serafini succeeded him, with an appointment formalized only in November 1898. Serafini had previously been Stevenson's assistant and completed the acquisition of Randi's collection. This increase was a result of the interest of Pope Leo XIII Pecci (1878–1903), who well understood the value of numismatics for research, even though he was not personally an enthusiast. He ensured that the innumerable medals donated to him on the occasions of the Holy Year in 1900 and his Pontifical Jubilee of 1903 were sent to the *Medagliere*, except for some specimens of sentimental value, which he donated to his relatives in Carpineto, his home town. Thanks to the support of Pius X Sarto (1903–1914), Serafini managed to publish, between 1910 and 1923, a huge four-volume catalogue entitled *Le monete e le bolle plumbee del Medagliere Vaticano*, an unsurpassed work on this specific topic to this day. The cooperation between Serafini and Achille Ratti, a man of

great learning and keen about numismatics, who was elected in 1922 with the name of Pius XI (1922–1939), made the *Medagliere* one of the richest and most prominent numismatic institutions in the world. The Pope gave unlimited resources to Serafini who used them with care to acquire missing pieces for several series of the *Medagliere*. The mutual admiration between the Pope and Serafini was so fruitful that Serafini did not renounce to the office of Keeper after being appointed Governor of the Vatican City, the new state born after the Lateran Pacts of 1929.

Around 1974–75, under the management of Luigi Michellini Tocci, the *Medagliere* moved to a more appropriate location; it was allocated the rooms previously used by the Noble Guard. Since the cabinets were insufficient to contain the new acquisitions of modern medals, Tocci's successor Giancarlo Alteri increased the number of the cabinets and drawers and had old furniture restored. In recent years, the *Medagliere* has continued to grow thank to donations and purchases. The contemporary medal collection of the *Medagliere* has been enlarged thanks to the donations of the most important contemporary medalists, which have made it a resource for scholars who want to study contemporary medallic art. The current curator responsible for the *Medagliere*, Eleonora Giampiccolo, continues the catalogues of the various collections.

Through its catalogues, its publications, and its periodical about medals and coins, the *Medagliere* contributes to the spread of numismatics and gives scholars significant support in their researches.

An Interview with Mark Santangelo at George Washington's Mount Vernon

Elizabeth Hahn Bengé

In November 2014 I had the opportunity to interview Mark Santangelo, the Chief Librarian and Archivist of the Fred W. Smith Library at George Washington's Mount Vernon in Virginia. Mark has been the Chief Librarian and Archivist at the Fred W. Smith Library since 2012. Before that, he worked for eleven years as the librarian in charge of the Onassis Library for Hellenic and Roman Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He also spent time as a general reference and humanities librarian at Princeton University. His interests in museums, history, art, and library science are reflected in his education. Mark earned two advanced degrees, including a Master's of Theology in History and Art from the Princeton Theological Seminary and a Master's in Library and Information Science from Rutgers University, which included a focus on archival studies.

Mark shared some fun facts about the library (and numismatic items on display) and opened up about his experiences managing such a large and important collection.

Elizabeth Hahn Bengé (EHB): Can you tell me a little bit about the library and the extent of the collections?

Mark Santangelo (MS) : The Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington at Mount Vernon opened its doors on September 27, 2013. The opening of the new library was an enormous cultural shift for Mount Vernon. Traditionally speaking, our reputation and expertise has centered upon the visitor experience. The opening of this library will be that moment in history when we began to evolve into an important research center for the study of George Washington and the Founders of our nation, the Early Republic, military history, and historic preservation.

Previously, we had a small house library that served the needs of Mount Vernon's staff. Our collections were in a climate-controlled, secured environment, but we had little opportunity to accommodate researchers. The new library changes everything with an exciting fellowship program for scholars utilizing the collections and with exceptional space to accommodate researchers from around the globe (Figure 1). Although we are not affiliated with the National Archives, we will be perceived in the tradition of the presidential libraries.

We are open to the public by appointment only. We do not qualify our patrons. Whether you are a student, an enthusiast, a scholar, or a Pulitzer Prize winner, the library is open to you. Our Access Services Librarian is delighted to schedule your appointment on our calendar and will meet you at the front door. Our collections consist of rare books and manuscripts (including 103 volumes from the library of George Washington), Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (among the first historic preservation groups in America), electronic resources, digital collections, microfilm, current monographs, periodicals, and serials. One of my favorite gems of the collection is

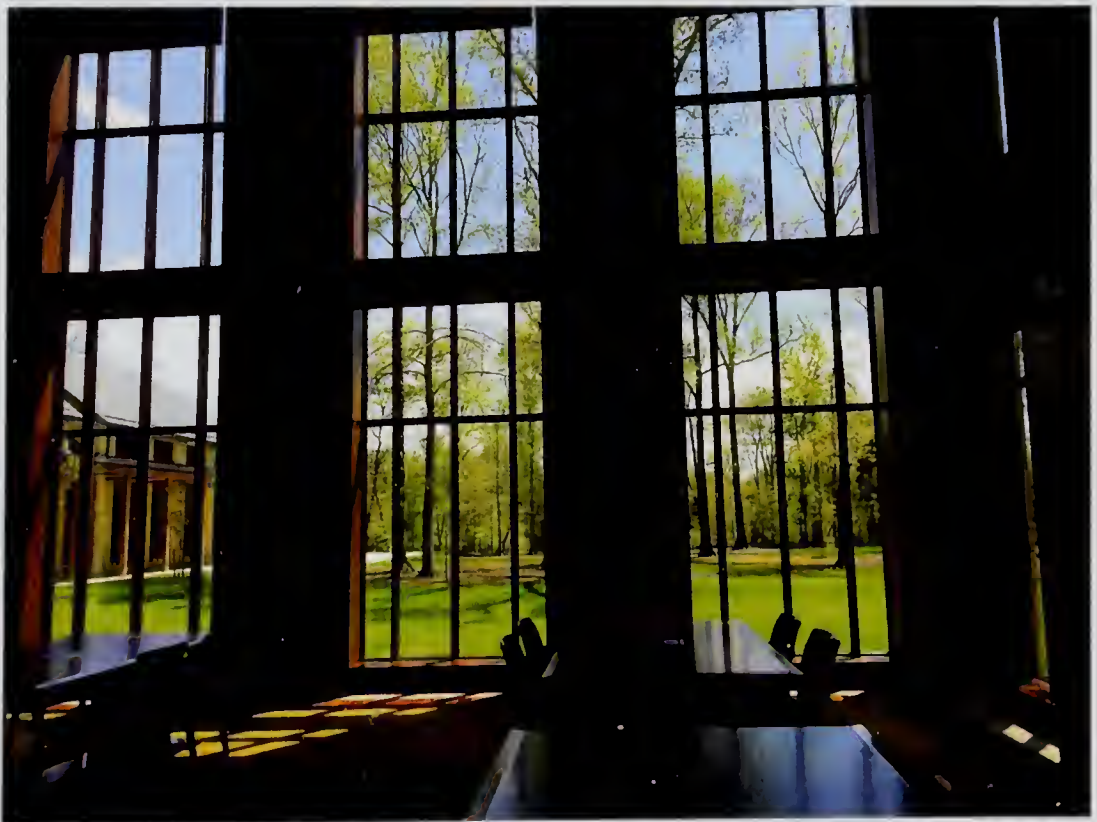


Figure 1. Reading room of the Fred W. Smith Library.

a love letter between George and Martha. In Martha's will she requested that all of the correspondence between her and George be burned. Somehow two of those letters escaped the flames, and we are delighted to have one of them in our collection.

EHB: Fascinating! I'm sure readers will want to know how to access these collections. Is everything cataloged online? And is this available to the public?

MS: The library's collection holds about 25,000 bibliographic records and is growing. Among the general collection, electronic resources, and special collections, over 95% of our holdings have been entered into our online catalog. <http://www.mountvernon.org/library/catalog-library-holdings/>. The archival collection has not yet been cataloged.

We have also recently installed a digital asset management system. We expect a public launch on our website in early 2015, with 10,000 digital items accessible from anywhere.

EHB: What an attractive looking catalog. I see your catalog uses Koha software, is that correct? Anyone familiar with DONUM, the ANS library's online catalog, which also uses Koha, will feel right at home searching your catalog.

MS: Yes, we've customized it a bit so it doesn't look like the standard Koha interface, but it uses the Koha software, just like DONUM.

EHB: Do you have any digitized books or plans for digitization?

MS: We have digitized George Washington's copy of the Acts of Congress for the session of 1789, which is one of about six known books containing marginalia by George Washington. We also have a rare almanac published in Germany in the 1780s, which has one of the earliest color publications of the American flag. It was a gift of Mr. & Mrs. Stanley DeForest Scott, and a prime candidate for digitization. In addition, our manuscript collection contains almost 6,000 items, many of which have not been documented. So with great privilege comes great responsibility, and it is our responsibility to digitize these materials and make them available to everyone through our website. We have a lot of fantastic work ahead of us.

EHB: Numismatists will surely recognize the names of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley DeForest Scott. They will be honored at the upcoming ANS Gala in January 2015. It is wonderful to see the variety of their involvement with such important research institutions. What kind of

visitors come to use the library? Have you had any unusual or “interesting” reference questions?

MS: We have quite a mix of patrons using library collections. We are still new on the scene so many people have requested a tour of the building, which we are happy to provide.

One of my favorite patrons was a retired professor, a mathematician, who was studying George Washington as a surveyor. He asked to look at Washington’s plat surveys from our manuscript collection. When we provided him with printouts from our digitized versions, he explained how he needed to see the original manuscripts to examine the pin pricks from where the compass met the paper. He was trying to assess George Washington’s knowledge of trigonometry. With that specific level of examination we pulled out every original Washington survey that we own. I enjoy that story on so many levels, one of which is that it came from a discipline not known for Washington studies.

EHB: That’s fascinating. Speaking of specific fields of study, what part of the library do you think would most appeal to numismatists? I remember seeing a number of medals on display when I last visited. Are these still on display? And do you have exhibits or other small displays of books or other objects in the library?

MS: We have a small but wonderful collection of coins and medals that commemorate various anniversaries in Washington’s career, from the oldest, the 1778 Washington “Voltaire” medal, to the 1932 bicentennial celebration of George Washington’s birth. We received some of our medals as a gift of Mr. & Mrs. Stanley DeForest Scott. It is a permanent display in our rare book room, with the installation designed after the 1860 Washington Cabinet of Medals at the US Mint (Figure 2).

Since there are few places in the Library to exhibit our collection, we display rare books and manuscripts in the Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center. We rotate materials frequently so the public can view some of the rarest items we own.

EHB: Do you get a lot of donations?

MS: The Library has benefited from the generosity of our friends and supporters throughout the years. Every gift, no matter how big or small, has played an important role in supporting our mission. We have received financial support for the building of the new Library, gifts for the Special Collection, such as George Washington manuscripts and rare books, materials for the Archives and for the general circulating



Figure 2. The display of medals in the rare book room at the Fred W. Smith Library.

collection. Mount Vernon does not accept any government funding, so the donations of our supporters are essential to our work.

EHB: What is your favorite item in the collections?

MS: That is a very difficult question to answer. I am thrilled about so many aspects of the collection: the love letter between George and Martha, the 1789 Acts of Congress with Washington's marginalia. But I am also enamored of the Peter Family archives, especially one letter from Nelly Parke Custis [[Washington's step-granddaughter]]. It is her eyewitness account of George Washington writing his Farewell Address. She was a young girl at the time and recalled such vivid detail in the letter, commenting that "the only thing I can't recall is the color of the thread he used to bind it together when he finished."

The library has extraordinary gems in our collection. The opening of the new library has created the opportunity to promote such treasures, which have received little attention until now. It is adventurous establishing a new Presidential Library, and it is an exciting time in the history of Mount Vernon.

EHB: Do you collect anything personally?

MS: I am not a serious collector by any means, but I enjoy a few Italian artifacts, whether an Etruscan strigil, an antique Neapolitan coffee pot, lire, Zuccherò songs, or culty Italian wines.

EHB: What a coincidence, I also share an enthusiasm for Italian wines and Zuccherò songs! Thank you so much, Mark, for taking the time to speak with me about this. I'm sure that our readers will find this fascinating and see a new place to add to their must-visit itineraries. Where can I direct anyone who wants more information?

MS: There is a lot of information about visiting and using the library catalog here: <http://www.mountvernon.org/library/>

Publications Associated with the International Medallic Exhibition of 1910

David Yoon

The beginning of the twentieth century was a modern high point for medallic art, which for a while was an important branch of sculpture with many highly regarded practitioners. Oddly, perhaps the greatest medallic exhibition of the era occurred not in France, then the center of the art world and birthplace of the modern art medal; instead, it occurred in a country that was, at best, still on the margins of international artistic significance. In March 1910, the American Numismatic Society (ANS) and the Hispanic Society of America hosted a major exhibition of contemporary medallic art in New York, with works by almost all of the many important medalists working around that time. Most of the works shown were loans from the artists, organizations, or businesses that produced them. The exhibition was held in a temporary building between the ANS and the Hispanic Society, on land where an extension to the Hispanic Society's building now stands. It was sponsored by Archer M. Huntington, who was the president of the Hispanic Society and had, until the beginning of 1910, been the president of the ANS as well.

In conjunction with this exhibition, the ANS published a number of catalogues and monographs. Although these publications are all known, they have caused occasional confusion, which I hope to reduce with this article. The confusion is an understandable consequence of the publication of three different catalogues, one of them in two editions, and three other monographs, some without any internal indication of their connection to the exhibition or the ANS.

The ANS Archives contain less documentation for these publications than one might expect, because like all the other expenses of the project, the costs were paid personally by Archer Huntington rather than from the Society's funds. Some of these publications bear no mention of the ANS, but all are listed in Bauman Belden's *Medals and*

Publications of the American Numismatic Society (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1915); the six items published in 1910 are also all found in the ANS Library bound together in a single volume. All seven items were printed by the De Vinne Press and bound in paper covers.

Three different catalogues were published because the exhibition of contemporary medalllic art was accompanied by two other exhibits drawn from the ANS collection: one of medals and decorations, the other of coins. Each of the three exhibits received its own catalogue; the ones for the main exhibit and the exhibit of coins are identified as such on the cover, but the one featuring medals from the ANS collection lacks any indication on its cover or title page that it is not the main exhibit of contemporary medalllic art: All three catalogues were probably compiled by Agnes Baldwin, the ANS curator, but only the second edition of the catalogue of contemporary medalllic art includes her name (at the end of the preface).

International Medalllic Exhibition of the American Numismatic Society, Opening on the Twelfth of March, 1910: Catalogue (Contemporary Medalists). 312 pages, 125 illustrations. Octavo. [This first edition of the catalogue of the main exhibition of contemporary medalllic art was a preliminary catalogue prepared in advance for distribution during the exhibition.]

Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Contemporary Medals. The American Numismatic Society, March, 1910. New and revised edition. xxxvi, 412 pages, 512 illustrations. Quarto. [This 1911 second edition is the definitive catalogue of the exhibition of contemporary medalllic art, listing 2051 items from 151 exhibitors.]

International Medalllic Exhibition of the American Numismatic Society, Opening on the Twelfth of March, 1910: Catalogue. 252 pages, 8 plates. Octavo. [Despite the generic title implying that it is the exhibition catalogue, this is the catalogue of 3506 medals from the ANS collection, the majority of them older historical or commemorative medals rather than contemporary medalllic art, displayed separately at the same time as the exhibition of contemporary medals.]

International Medalllic Exhibition of the American Numismatic Society, Opening on the Twelfth of March, 1910: Catalogue (Coins). 49 pages, 6 plates, 1 errata sheet. Octavo. [This catalogue lists 1190 coins exhibited by the ANS at the same time as the main exhibition.]

In addition to these catalogues, the ANS published three short monographs in 1910 to accompany the exhibition. Of these only the one by William Weeks, an abridged and slightly updated version of his 1892 *History of the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society*, bears any indication that it is an ANS publication. As mentioned above, though, all three are listed by Bauman Belden, who probably coordinated their preparation for publication, in his *Medals and Publications of the American Numismatic Society*:

Brenner, Victor D. *The Art of the Medal*. 46 pages, 29 illustrations. Octavo.

De Kay, Charles. *A Brief Word on Medals*. 24 pages. Octavo.

Weeks, William R. *The American Numismatic Society*. 20 pages, 1 plate. Octavo.

Of these publications, the second edition of the catalogue of contemporary medallic art is clearly the centerpiece, although the catalogue of the exhibit of medals from the ANS collection and Brenner's essay both retain some interest as well. They were produced to high standards, with the main catalogue's abundance of plates made possible by Archer Huntington's wealth and his willingness to spend it on such projects.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I thank George Kolbe for his comments and information on this topic.

Off the Shelf: The Sales of J. M. Henderson

David F. Fanning

John M. Henderson (1870–1942) of Columbus, Ohio was a prominent American collector in the first few decades of the twentieth century (Figure 1). He is perhaps best known today for his term as president¹ of the American Numismatic Association (1909–11) and for the sale of his collection of half cents and large cents at auction by S. H. Chapman in 1921.² Less remembered today are the seven auctions held by Henderson himself, who was a dentist by trade and only a dabbler in the commercial end of numismatics. Dabbler though he may have been, his final catalogue was the 1938 ANA sale, suggesting that he may be deserving of a second glance.

Henderson's first auction sale was held on September 5, 1932, in conjunction with the Ohio State Numismatic Society's annual convention

1 The 1909 ANA presidential election was unusually contentious, pitting Henderson against Frank C. Higgins. With the convention taking place for the first time in Montreal, many of the votes placed were via proxies—most of them for Henderson. The Higgins camp, with Tom Elder's *Numismatic Philistine* serving as unofficial (loud) mouthpiece, alleged abuse of the proxy system, even as Higgins himself gracefully bowed out and allowed Henderson's election to be unanimous. Elder wrote that "The *Numismatist*'s feeble effort to cover up the Montreal discomfiture does not deceive any member of the A.N.A. nowadays. Somebody had to take the mud bath to go through the ditch dug around the official citadel and chase the occupants out into the light of day, where their methods stand apparent so that he who runs may read. Three hundred and seventy-five proxies in the hands of four persons, of whom three are officers in control of the official bulletin and playing into each other's hands, against seventy-one proxies divided up among the other fourteen voters at the convention. Doesn't that tell the tale?" In fact, Elder's wrath about the election had more to do with Farran Zerbe, a Henderson promoter, than with Henderson himself, whom Elder grudgingly admitted to be "a pretty good fellow anyhow."

2 S. H. Chapman, *A Collection of United States Gold and Silver Coins Consigned by W. A. Hilliard, Esq., Salem, N.J. and the Choice Collection of Cents and Half Cents of Dr. J. M. Henderson, ex-President, A.N.A., Columbus, Ohio. The Kingman Collection of Fractional Currency* (Philadelphia: S. T. Freeman & Co., Auctioneers, May 27, 1921). The plated version of the Henderson catalogue is among the rarest of U.S. numismatic auction catalogues.



Figure 1. Dr. John M. Henderson, as depicted in his obituary (*The Numismatist* 55 no. 8 [August 1942]: 604).

(Figure 2). The site was the Neil House, a 400-room hotel and a Columbus institution situated across the street from the Ohio Statehouse until the hotel's demolition in 1981. The auction was organized by the Ohio State Numismatic Society, and Henderson likely found himself assuming the role of auctioneer due to his position as Treasurer of the Society. Henderson is identified as the cataloguer on the title page, and bids were to be addressed to him at his office in the Citizens Savings and Trust Building at 51 N. High Street (Figure 3). The sale is perhaps most notable for including a nice set of \$3 gold pieces (including 1873), rare National Bank Notes (including Napier and Thompson signed notes), a good collection of Ohio broken bank notes, a 1907 wire-edge gold \$10 with periods, and a 1915 Panama-Pacific set in the original frame.

On October 14 and 16, 1933, the Ohio State Numismatic Society held another sale, again calling upon Treasurer Henderson to catalogue and administer the sale. As before, the Neil House would be the site of the sale: in fact, Henderson held all seven of his sales in the well-known, centrally located hotel. The sale would be less notable than the previous year's, except that it included a very nice consignment of private and territorial gold coins, including an 1851 880 THOUS. Augustus Humbert

Catalogue of
**Gold and Silver
Coins**

United States Notes
Broken Bank Notes, Fractional Currency, Etc.

**The Consignments of Members of The
Ohio State Numismatic Society, Inc.**

TO BE SOLD AT

Public Auction

...at...

The Neil House
Columbus, Ohio

Monday, September 5, 1932

At 10 A. M.

(Eastern Standard Time)

Figure 2. Henderson's first auction catalogue, dated September 5, 1932.



Figure 3. The Citizens Savings and Trust Building, where Dr. Henderson had his office during the period of his auction sales. The building, in downtown Columbus at the corner of High and Gay Streets, is currently being converted from office space to apartments.

\$50 piece, an 1852 900 THOUS. \$50, an 1855 Wass, Molitor & Co. small head \$20, an 1852 Moffat & Co. 264 GRS \$10 piece, 1849 and 1850 Holi-ness to the Lord \$5 Mormon pieces, and more.

Henderson's sale of June 1, 1935, was originally intended to be another one held in conjunction with a convention of the Ohio State Numismatic Society, but according to the catalogue, "it was discovered the dates would likely conflict with other meetings, so the convention was postponed, but as the consignments were in, it was decided to hold the sale as planned." A collection of quarter eagles opens the sale, with Henderson writing that "All gold coins are now rare and getting

more so every day. The gold returned to the Treasury has nearly all been melted into gold bars." A consignment of early silver dollars (attributed by Haseltine number) follows. A substantial group of encased postage stamps and Lincoln-era ferrotypes adds some spice to the sale, with some rare Ohio banknotes (including a Kirtland \$100) also featured prominently.

The collection of the late Henrie Edmund Buck was offered in Henderson's April 4, 1936, sale. In his introduction, Henderson notes that Buck, a former vice-president of the American Numismatic Association, had been his own sponsor for ANA membership many years before. The 1445-lot sale featured some scarce (at the time) CC dollars, decent large cents including a VF AMERI. chain cent and an EF 1794 Hays 27, 1861 Montgomery notes, Republic of Texas and Government of Texas notes, and some good half dimes including "1802—A fine example of someone's handicraft in producing an electro of an altered 1800 half dime." It should come as no surprise that Henderson is at his best when describing large cents, given the emphasis his own collecting had laid upon that series. A printed prices-realized list is offered for 50 cents, though I've never seen a copy.

The next catalogue, that of February 6, 1937, bears some indication that Henderson's ability to put together sales was beginning to be appreciated by a wider audience. The sale of the collection of the late Jesse E. Hische, the auction was held at the request of the estate and appears to have had no connection to the Ohio State Numismatic Society. Bert L. Foster is identified in the catalogue as the auctioneer, with previous sales making no mention of who played this role. The sale is most significant for paper money, with Henderson noting that "Mr. Hische specialized in U.S. Currency and Fractional Currency." The fractional currency was catalogued carefully by Henderson, with varieties, paper, surcharges, signatures, and repairs noted. Uncut sheets of fractional currency were offered, as was a shield.

But two months passed before Henderson's April 24, 1937, sale, this time as part of the Ohio State Numismatic Society convention. The sale's contents are small potatoes, with a glimmer of excitement caused by an 1850 Holiness to the Lord \$5 Mormon piece being quickly dimmed by Henderson's note that it has been "holed and slugged" [*sic*].

If the previous sale is Henderson's least impressive offering, surely the capstone of his numismatic career is his following sale, the August

16, 1938, ANA sale. While ANA sales of the day were far from the grand spectacles of today, they were still important public events and being asked to catalogue it was quite a feather in Henderson's cap. Still, the contents of the sale are mediocre compared to plenty of sales of the day, with Adams rating it an unimpressive C+ overall.³ The sale opened with paper money, with a partial sheet of four 1873 notes of the First National Bank of Lincoln, Illinois, bringing \$40. A 1795 \$10 gold piece in EF brought \$55 and a 1932 ("None of this date were supposed to have left the Mint") brought \$30. A small but nice consignment of private and territorial gold included an 1850 Baldwin & Co. \$5 piece, an 1852 Wass, Molitor & Co. \$5, and an 1849 Oregon Exchange Co. \$5. Henderson seems to err on the side of extravagance in his commentary, noting that an 1878-CC \$20 had a retail price of \$150 and was well worth it, only to have the coin sell for \$40.

While one would have to consider Henderson a minor cataloguer of the time, his seven sales are interesting for what they tell us about this notable collector⁴ and as examples of numismatic commercial publications of the period in a locale fairly far removed from the hub of numismatic activity on the East Coast.

3 John W. Adams, *United States Numismatic Literature. Volume II: Twentieth Century Auction Catalogs* (Crestline: Kolbe, 1990).

4 For a good biography of Henderson, see Jack W. Ogilvie, "Dr. John M. Henderson: Eighth President, 1910 and 1911," *The Numismatist* 74 no. 10 (October 1961): 1361-1364.

From the ANS Library

David Hill

I appreciate having this opportunity, as the American Numismatic Society's newest Francis D. Campbell Librarian, to introduce myself to the readers of *The Asylum*. I know you are familiar with the work of my predecessor, NBS Vice-President and *Asylum* Editor-in-Chief Elizabeth Hahn Bengé, who, along with all of her other obligations in Chicago, now finds herself having to contend with my emails seeking advice. It will surprise no one to hear that her responses have been thorough, informative, and cheerful, all qualities I came to associate with Elizabeth during the five years I had the pleasure to work with her as the Society's archivist. So much was accomplished in the Harry W. Bass library under Elizabeth's leadership. One of the most important developments was the introduction of a new online catalog, DONUM, followed by a massive, multi-year effort to barcode and create item records for tens of thousands of individual items held by the library. Nearly all of the monographs in the general collection, along with many of the other materials, have been processed so far, making it much easier to efficiently manage the library's holdings.

With all that has been accomplished, it will be a tough act to follow. But despite the hard work and remarkable progress made over the years, there will always be more that needs doing. (In other words, I don't think we'll ever quite get to the point where we say, "Well, that's it!") There are thousands of periodicals, auction catalogs, and pamphlet files that still need barcodes and item records, for example. And there are a number of personal collections that are shelved outside of our regular subject areas, such as those of numismatist and coin dealer David Bullowa (1912–1953) and ANS curator Agnes Baldwin Brett (1876–1955), that need a bit more processing. Some of the works in these collections present challenges. Many of the rare books from Islamic curator George Miles (1904–1975), for example, will require a knowledge of Arabic for catalog-

ing. Likewise, the library of John Reilly (1876–1931), an ANS treasurer who in the early twentieth century amassed the largest collection of Far Eastern coins in the world, contains works in various Asian languages. The treasures in such collections can seem endless, but if left uncataloged, may remain hidden, only to be discovered through serendipity.

Chance, however, can sometimes yield the greatest discoveries. The other day, a large stack of Reilly's books in the ANS's rare book room caught my eye. They didn't look like much on the shelf, the once-elegant linen-upholstered boxes housing them now broken and frayed. But to my delight, a turn of their fine silk covers revealed page after page of richly hued, hand-colored photographs of Japanese life, glowing with vibrant reds, greens, violets, and pinks, which had been tipped in or mounted to accompany the text. I soon discovered that it was the ten-volume *Japan, Described and Illustrated by the Japanese*, edited by Japanophile Captain Francis Brinkley and published in Boston in 1897. Known also for the inclusion of stunning collotype flower prints by acclaimed Japanese photographer Kazumasa Ogawa, the set was issued in a variety of editions. The ANS is fortunate to have a deluxe Emperor's edition (numbered 2 of 75), meaning it also contains original works of art on silk and paper. The collections of John Reilly seem in particular to abound with such gems waiting to be discovered. My earlier finds there include a set of film negatives he took as a student at the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893, and also what appears to be one of the few surviving issues of *The Chinese American*, a newspaper published by journalist and activist Wong Chin Foo in New York City in 1883. Those sat concealed and forgotten for years before being discovered and cataloged, and we expect to make more exciting discoveries as we continue our work processing the rest of the collections.

Looking ahead, we think about the possibilities for digitizing and making some of the library's collections available online. We have already begun the process with some of Edward Newell's notebooks containing his research on Greek coins, the scans of which are now available on the ANS's archival database, ARCHER. This naturally has led us to consider some of the out-of-copyright published materials in the library that might be candidates for similar treatment, such as our early auction catalogs. One of the first steps will be to add details to the existing, often skeletal, records that were created in the days of the card catalog, and we will want to begin this process by focusing our attention on the most

useful works. With American auction catalogs, at least, we are fortunate to have a guidebook we can turn to assist us, John Adams's *United States Numismatic Literature*, which helpfully assigns letter grades to the catalogs. For foreign catalogs, John Spring's *Ancient Coin Auction Catalogues, 1880-1980* should serve as one useful guide. And, of course, we are closely following the exciting development of the Newman Numismatic Portal, a project sponsored by the Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society, which aims to digitize the legendary scholar and collector's vast print, manuscript, and numismatic collections. To avoid duplicating efforts and ensure that our resources are used wisely, we know we will have to coordinate our work with these other projects. For example, it came as great news that the long-languishing Numismatic Indexes Project, an online catalog of numismatic periodicals that was at one time funded and hosted by the Harry Bass Foundation, would be resurrected as part of the Newman Portal (*E-Sylum*, v.17, n.51, Dec. 14, 2014). The ANS library has traditionally indexed individual numismatic articles, and DONUM now contains over 100,000 such records, so we are following these developments closely.

It is an exciting time for me, as I continue to meet and work with the great names of numismatics, so many of whom can be found in the pages of *The Asylum*. I welcome any suggestions as to how the ANS library might better serve our community. Please feel free to contact me at hill@numismatics.com.

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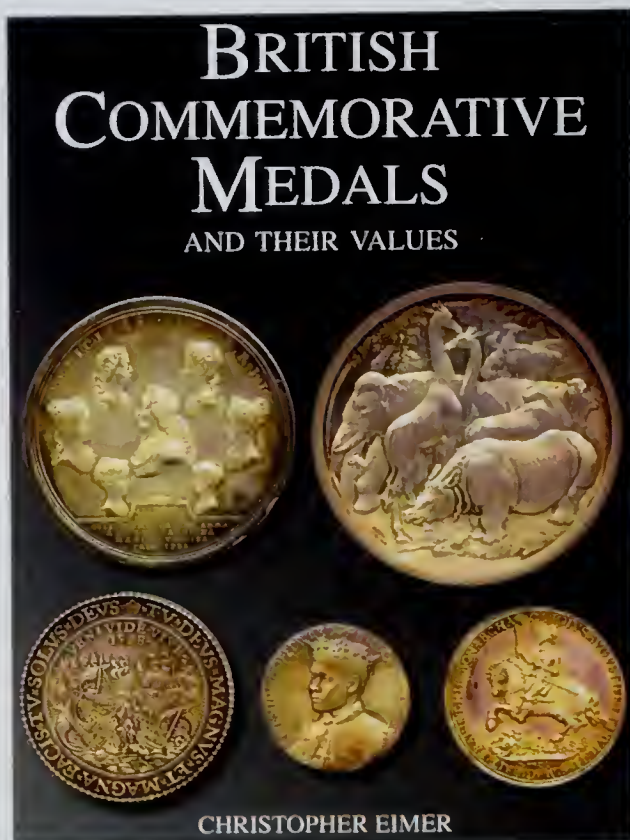
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